

Working for Independence... continued

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sure that she was doing well. Stacy made the decision to return to Lincoln and accepted a job at the League of Human Dignity.

When she found an apartment, Voc Rehab was there to help. They assisted with an automatic door opener.

Funding for vehicle modifications also enabled Stacy to purchase a van that meets her needs and allows her the freedom of transportation.

She has settled happily into her new career and gives much credit to Voc Rehab and her counselors there. They were all “very helpful,” Stacy commented, and “very encouraging.”

She remembers working with Kathy Clements and Ruth Markhofer, out of O’Neill, (now the Norfolk office) and Jean Bullen and Kathy Berger in Lincoln.

“The co-ordination between the offices... was just great,” she said. “I never felt like I had a lapse in services at all.”

Stacy Sellers has overcome every barrier in her path. With a little help and a lot of hard work she has achieved her goals and continues to make new ones. Stacy now lives independently and is helping others to find that same happiness. □

Quality Employment Solutions® is an official publication provided by Vocational Rehabilitation, Nebraska Department of Education. It is published to exchange information on rehabilitation services and topics of mutual interest to Nebraskans involved in working with people with disabilities.

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Quality Employment Solutions®
Vocational Rehabilitation
Nebraska Department of Education
State of Nebraska
P.O. Box 94987
Lincoln, NE 68509

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Nebraska Department of Education

Issue 54

Working for Independence

Co-ordination works for O’Neill/Lincoln Woman

Certain skills can be very difficult to master. Many people, both those that have a disability and those that don’t, have trouble learning to budget their money, prepare meals, find housing and resources, etc. When individuals with disabilities encounter these problems, Stacy Sellers does her best to provide assistance.

She works for the League of Human Dignity in Lincoln. The League helps persons with disabilities to master independent living skills, and offers advocacy services to those in need. Stacy is perfectly suited to this career. Indeed, her journey to find it began the day she was born.

Stacy has cerebral palsy. This makes balance a big issue for her. It is also difficult for her to develop muscle tone and keep it. She works daily to stay strong, ensuring, among other things, that she will be able to transfer to and from her wheelchair each day.

As a teenager, Stacy was put in touch with Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) in O’Neill. She became part of Voc Rehab’s transition program to help students with disabilities plan for

their futures. Stacy recalled participating in an “...assessment to see where my interests were...”

She also remembered the support Voc Rehab gave her in other areas. They provided a computer for Stacy and a referral to someone that could provide voice recognition software.

Another big benefit to Stacy’s work with Voc Rehab was the new bathroom they funded. All throughout her childhood, she had been using a bathroom that was not accessible for her. “They helped finance making the bathroom accessible at my house,” she said, gratefully.

After Stacy graduated, she realized that Voc Rehab could continue to be a valuable resource. She decided to attend college and Voc Rehab assisted her. Stacy went to Minneapolis, attending Augsburg College.

Vocational Rehabilitation provided for some of her schooling and paid for all of her books. They also updated Stacy’s computer, acknowledging that the old one was no longer sufficient.

She ultimately graduated with her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. Voc Rehab helped her locate possible employers and kept in touch to make

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Stacy Sellers

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between the offices...

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Good Times Ahead

Voc Rehab assists Omaha man after a car accident

In July of 1997, Craig Holcomb was married, had a new baby, and was an outstanding student at the University of Nebraska, Omaha; and then, the car accident that would change his life. Sitting at a red light, Craig's car was rear-ended.

The accident damaged three discs in his neck, and two in his back. This can cause extreme pain and be debilitating, but Craig is optimistic, saying, "You can't let it dominate your life." Six years later, he has just one more operation to undergo.

Craig dealt with the pain from his injury with help from a pain control specialist, and by receiving cortisone shots. Following extensive rehab and a number of surgeries, Craig was ready to find out what he could do.

His dreams of becoming a Physician's Assistant were no longer plausible. His brother told him about an agency called Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) that was right there in Omaha. Craig scheduled an appointment.

Ultimately, Leta Simms and Susan Hagen became his Voc Rehab counselors. Craig can't say enough about these two women. "They were wonderful...Susan Hagen and Leta Simms were absolutely the most wonderful people I've ever worked with."

Craig remembers how helpful the Voc Rehab team was in many aspects of the job search. Not only did they look for positions that would suit him, but offered interview tips and other advice. They told him what kinds of questions he could expect in an interview, and what employers were looking for.

They also gave him tips on how to dress to impress. "You don't go to Voc Rehab and they automatically find a job for you," Craig stressed, "They work with you."

They began to work on finding Craig a career when, in June of 2003, he broke his leg. The injury was severe enough to require surgery, and the job search went on

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through them."



Craig Holcomb

the back burner. He took a little more time to recover, but didn't give up on his goals.

He resumed working with Susan and Leta, and it wasn't long before it paid off. Susan had the inside scoop on a position with Goodfellows Charity, an Omaha organization subsidized by the Omaha World Herald. Craig was hired to fill the position.

"The World Herald's a great place to work, Craig commented." Goodfellows focuses on providing one-time emergency assistance. Craig's job was to match donors with recipients.

"I really enjoyed it because I could relate...I know what it's like being injured and not being able to work. It was very rewarding." During the 2003 Christmas season, the charity provided 2,250 food vouchers for those who needed help with Christmas dinner.

Since starting with the Omaha World Herald, another opportunity has arisen. In December of 2003, Craig accepted a position with the paper in classified advertising.

One of his goals now is to return to school and finish his degree with a focus in Public Relations. He has just a few credits left to complete. Craig is pleased and excited with his new position in classified advertising and remembers Voc Rehab as the agency that helped him get there.

"I wouldn't have the position I have if it wasn't for Voc Rehab. Everybody there were really wonderful, kind people...they care."

He thanks his counselors as well, saying of Susan, "She works exceptionally hard...she went above and beyond the call of duty..."

Craig's outlook is tremendously bright. "We're all faced with difficulties and we've got to get through them," he said. "Good times are ahead." □

Determined to Succeed

Karen Nichols lands job at Offutt

When Karen Nichols first went to Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) in Omaha, she was already familiar with the program. Her journey with Voc Rehab began in Colorado, and she was pleased and enthusiastic about the help they gave her. "They were there to help me with my first job every step of the way," she said.

When she moved to Nebraska to be closer to her family, Voc Rehab was the logical place to start. She met with Voc Rehab Counselor Shobha Ayyappan, and knew she had made the right choice. "She was wonderful," Karen said. "The first meeting I thought she was great."

Together they talked about what Karen could do. They took her disability into consideration. Karen has a mild mental handicap, and she sometimes needs help learning new things.

She did have great experience in the food service industry, and really liked that work. "I thought, Oh yeah! That's what I want...I enjoyed that a lot." Shobha remembered, "She loves baking and cooking."

Shobha helped Karen brush up on her interviewing skills and talked about filling out applications. Shobha provided a job facts book, and even though Karen felt that she really didn't need it, she found that it was a big help.

They also had to talk about transportation because Karen did not drive. They discussed taking the bus, and found the necessary information.

For now, she depends on others for transportation, but she is still considering the bus. Karen is excited to try it because of the additional independence it would afford her.

Karen had filled out a few applications and searched the job market for a while before Shobha considered the opportunities in food service at Offutt Air Force Base. This employment project jointly funded by Nebraska Voc Rehab, Health and Human Services and

"I've shown a lot of

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Karen Nichols

Black Hills workshop out of South Dakota.

Karen had a good feeling about this one, and so braved an awful summer storm and tornado threat to fill out the application.

A short time later, she was told that they had selected her for the job. It was July of 2003. Karen was thrilled. "I thought, oh my word! I got a job already!"

She settled into the new job with ease. A couple of Karen's responsibilities include bussing tables and washing dishes.

"I love it," Karen said. "Every minute of it." She is also excited about her employer. "There are so many support givers in that place..." she enthused. "They are very helpful."

Shobha has received wonderful feedback about Karen from her employer. Among her strengths are her willing-

ness to help and polite attitude.

Another positive aspect of her Offutt job is the full benefit package she receives. "To be covered and have insurance is really something else," Karen said gratefully. She remembers the expense and stress that can be caused by not having health insurance coverage.

"It's been great," Karen said of her experiences with Vocational Rehabilitation and Offutt Air Force Base. She has overcome so much and has a great attitude about her life and disability.

"I've gotten over it through the years. I've shown a lot of people that given the chance to do a job, I can be a good employee," Karen said with emotion.

Shobha agreed, saying; "I have enjoyed working with Karen and found her to be very pleasant to work with. She is sincere, punctual, hardworking, and puts her best effort in all she does. I wish her success and happiness in all her endeavors." □